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JPRS 83308

21 April 1983

USSR Report

MILITARY AFFAIRS

No. 1761

FBIS

FOREIGN BROADCAST INFORMATION SERVICE

ARMED FORCES

REPORTS ON SOVIET MILITARY LIFE IN AFGHANISTAN

Importance of DRA's Salang Highway

PM041037 Moscow IZVESTIYA in Russian 2 Feb 83 morning edition p 5

[Own correspondent G. Ustinov "Afghan Reportage": "The Pass Is Open"]

[Text] Kabul [no date given]--We flew from Kabul to Balkh in the north of the country. The small aircraft of the Afghan Air Force was carrying newspapers, parcels and other mail. About two dozen passengers were occupying the vacant seats. It was a sunny day and through the portholes we could all see clearly the endless chain of snow-capped mountain peaks slashed by deep gorges.

Suddenly the mountains parted and the highway shone through below. "Salang," my neighbor, a young Afghan soldier, who throughout had been resting his bandaged leg on a sack of newspapers, said softly. "I was there just 3 days ago." And he thoughtfully touched his plaster-covered leg.

The roar of the engines prevented conversation and we again looked down toward the highway. Sometimes it ran straight as an arrow, sometimes it began to twist like a snake, rose and wound itself like a narrow ribbon around the steep slopes of the mountains....

I had heard a lot about this highway linking Kabul with the Soviet border. The question of its construction arose as far back as 1928 during the visit to our country by the Afghan King Amanullah Khan. In his record of the conversation with the King, G.V. Chicherin, USSR people's commissar for foreign affairs, noted: "He particularly highlighted two very topical questions: The building of a highway and a trade treaty: Afghanistan undoubtedly needs a highway link with the USSR. This is necessary both economically and politically."

At that time, however, the implementation of a complex project requiring great material expenditure was difficult. The idea was dropped until the late fifties. The construction of a modern asphalted highway was begun by Soviet and Afghan workers and experts in 1958 and completed in 1964. The highway includes the 3 km Salang tunnel driven through the Hindu Kush at a height of over 3,300 meters above sea level. It also gave its name to the high mountain section of the highway. This section, which makes it possible to considerably shorten the old caravan routes, is 108 km long.

The new highway linked the main Afghan industrial centers in a single economic complex: The Jabal Os Saraj and Pol-e Khomri cement plants, the Karkar coal mines, the Golbahar textile factory and the Qonduz cotton gin. It provided the shortest link between the northern provinces--Afghanistan's granary--and the center of the country and made it considerably easier and cheaper to transport freight both within the country and between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union. Whereas trucks used to take 2-3 days to reach the border port of Shir Khan from Kabul, it now takes them only 6-8 hours. But the main point is that traffic used to be interrupted for 9 months a year because of snow and avalanches. With the building of the modern highway with its tunnels, snow protection galleries and dozens of reinforced concrete metal bridges, traffic has become uninterrupted.

Afghanistan has no railroads, and thus you can imagine what a good highway means to the country, especially in such a crucial direction. The economic and military roles of the highway and the Salang Pass grew particularly after the April revolution, when revolutionary Afghanistan's trade and economic cooperation with its northern neighbor increased considerably. However, gangs of counterrevolutionaries sent in from abroad to try to disrupt this link have repeatedly attacked the convoys of trucks along this highway in an attempt to break this transport connection.

"...Down there, on the highway, is where I received my baptism of fire," my neighbor in the aircraft said.

We landed. An ambulance arrived for my neighbor with two of his comrades inside. Following the widely accepted custom they embraced their fellow countryman three times each in turn. I asked them to stay for a while and tell me what had been happening at the Salang Pass recently. This is what I heard in reply.

"Our battalion, commanded by S Capt (Nazir Gol)," they said, "was accompanying a large group of trucks bound for Kabul. This is a necessary measure: In the unpopulated mountain regions the Dushmans often attack transport convoys, hijack the trucks and kill the drivers."

By means of the "wireless telegraph," the local inhabitants reported that one of the gangs hiding in the mountains was preparing an attack and was planning not only to seize the convoy but also to decommission the highway and destroy Kabul's food, fuel and medical supply lines.

For assistance (Nazir Gol)'s battalion was given two groups of [Khad] (state security organ) staffers and Sarandoy (militia).

Soon after the convoy had left the Salang Tunnel and was approaching the villages of (Farza) and (Kuchi), the crew of the leading armored personnel carrier noticed suspicious activity on the road about 800 meters ahead of the column. "The highway is being mined," (Nazir Gol) surmised and halted the column. At that moment automatic fire rained down on the convoy from concealed positions in the mountains on both sides of the highway.

The battalion commander gave the order: "Fire!" and all the members of the escort detachment opened fire in reply. The fighting lasted over 1 hour.... The Dushmans' attack was beaten off and the gang fled in disarray, leaving behind several dozen dead and wounded. Interrogation of the prisoners revealed that the gang had numbered about 400.

As I found out later from the military newspaper HAQIAT-E SARBAZ, mine clearance began on the highway immediately after the battle. Soviet servicemen came to the aid of their Afghan friends in that. While that work was underway, several Afghan soldiers wounded by the Dushmans were taken to the Soviet garrison's medical unit. (Nadzhibulla Sherzay), whom I had come to know in the aircraft, was among those men.

"It was my first meeting with Soviet soldiers," he said, "and I was very pleased by their cordiality and their sincere desire to provide assistance. The peasants of (Kuchi) village, where we made a brief stop, said that Soviet soldiers maintain a firm friendship with local inhabitants, help with their work in the fields, in the procurement of fuel and other matters. When I thanked the Soviet commander for the concern shown to me and my comrades, he simply smiled and said: How else could it be, we have a common cause--to defend the Afghan revolution...."

Atheist Education in Services

PM231049 Moscow KRASNAYA ZVEZDA in Russian 5 Feb 83 first edition p 1

[Editorial: "Servicemens' Atheistic Education"]

[Text] The tasks which the party has laid down for further improving ideological and political-educational work are being tackled persistently in the Soviet armed forces. The servicemens' ideological tempering and the formation in them of a scientific philosophy, selfless devotion to the cause of the party and the ideals of communism and constant readiness to defend the motherland and the gains of socialism were and remain at its core.

To form in servicemen a scientific world outlook and enhance their ideological tempering means equipping people with a profound understanding of the laws and prospects of social development and of scientific and technical progress. The solution of this task is inseparable from the army and navy personnel's atheistic education.

During the years of Soviet power, as a result of the triumph of materialist ideology and the development of science, culture and public education, a new Soviet man has been formed who is infinitely devoted to his socialist motherland and the ideals of communism, a man with a materialist understanding and perception of the surrounding world. But at the same time a certain proportion of people, and this includes young people, find themselves the captives of various religious prejudices that are energetically propagated by the church and diverse sects.

Such people are encountered, albeit rarely, even among draftees. They arrive in our military collectives with views on military service that are often

erroneous. Therefore, attention to such people and skillful work with them is one of the most important tasks for commanders, political workers and party and Komsomol organizations.

Atheistic educational work must also be carried out constantly with the whole personnel. This is also called for by the fact that the modernization of contemporary religious ideology, which conceals the falsity and harmfulness of a religious world outlook, can give rise in certain people to a mistaken conception of religion's social role. It has also to be remembered that there are a considerable number of figures abroad who are attempting to export religious ideas and religious wares to our country and that in the international arena religion is constantly being used by imperialist propaganda against communist ideology and the socialist community countries for political ends. Therefore atheistic work must be carried out in a considered and militant fashion and must educate young people in a spirit of communist ideology and morality and help them to develop within themselves a vigorous life stance.

Atheistic education is a matter of great importance. Intransigence toward religion--religion, which is incompatible with the world outlook and morality of an energetic fighter for the new communist society--must be combined with a sensitive, considerate attitude toward believers. One should not cut oneself off from believers but reeducate them by means of persuasion and by involving them in an active social life.

The complete extirpation of survivals of the past from people's consciousness and the overcoming of the factors which give rise to religiosity require a further boost in the people's spiritual culture and education and much patient work. Rudeness, gibes and lack of respect for believers' feelings are inadmissible here. "One has to be exceptionally careful when combating religious prejudices," V.I. Lenin pointed out, "those who introduce the abuse of religious feeling into this struggle do a great deal of harm."

Many party and Komsomol organizations in the army and navy are employing various forms of scientific atheistic propaganda with increasing fruitfulness. A great deal of work in this direction is being carried out, for example, by the members of the agitational and propaganda collective, soldiers' club and library of a guards motorized infantry unit in which guards Maj A. Korovin is a propagandist. On the basis of a long-term plan here lectures, discussions and the viewing of films on the theme of atheistic education are conducted regularly. Essential reading matter for the servicemen is selected and recommended. Particular attention is accorded to individual work with the young intake.

At the same time the scale and standard of scientific atheistic propaganda is still far from everywhere meeting the demands placed upon it. There are facts which indicate that insufficient attention is being accorded to this important area of educational work in certain units and subunits. At times speeches suffer from cliches and crudeness, which can be attributed to the incompetence of certain propagandists and the scant concern of political organs for their training. Such defects are intolerable and should be resolutely eliminated. It has to be constantly remembered that the chief

thing in servicemens' education is not the quantity of measures but their effectiveness and high efficiency. Little benefit, for example, is derived from lectures if they are general and abstract in nature and take account neither of the essential changes which are taking place in people's consciousness under the influence of scientific and social progress nor the sophisticated operations carried out by modern religious organizations.

It is very important today to expose the correlation of religion and nationalistic survivals. One still encounters attempts to present religiosity as a feature of national distinctiveness and nonobservance of religious festivals as all but apostasy from the "behests of the fathers." Such attempts are supported and fanned in every possible way from without by bourgeois propaganda which is aimed at reviving religious and nationalist prejudices.

Party and Komsomol organizations in the army and navy must present the matter in such a way that atheistic propaganda is not only systemic and reaches the masses but militant and forceful too. This greatly depends on drawing the broad army and navy community--all servicemen without exception--into the ranks of vigorous fighters against the survivals of the past. Every communist and Komsomol member must be a militant atheist. The CPSU Central Committee resolution "On the further improvement of ideological and political-educational work" demands the intensification of atheistic work. It is the duty of commanders, political workers and army and navy party and Komsomol organizations to fulfill the party's instructions, inculcate persistently a scientific-materialist world outlook and foster in every serviceman a vigorous life stance.

PDPA's Influence on Military

PM140907 Moscow KRASNAYA ZVEZDA in Russian 11 Feb 83 first edition p 3

[TASS correspondent A. Greshnov report: "The Ranks of Army PDPA Organizations Are Swelling"]

[Text] Kabul, 10 Feb--Meetings are taking place in party organizations in the DRA armed forces to discuss the state of work in fulfilling the decisions of the 10th PDPA Central Committee plenum. The party members' attention is focused on questions connected with increasing the combat readiness of units and subunits and the militancy and activeness of primary party organizations and educating military cadres.

"The fifth anniversary of the April revolution, which opened up for the Afghan people the opportunity to work for the sake of their motherland, is approaching," Col (Abdul Gaffar), chief of the DRA armed forces general staff political section, said in an interview for TASS' correspondent. "But the Afghans' peace and quiet is being disrupted by the forces of counter-revolution, supported and encouraged by imperialist reaction. It is the task and duty of the DRA armed forces to defend the working people against the crimes being perpetrated by bandit groups which are sent into the country from Pakistani territory.

"PDPA members in units and subunits of the DRA armed forces are currently declaring their unanimous support for the decisions of the party's Central Committee and the revolutionary government. Many officers and men link their destiny with the PDPA. In the last 2 months alone primary party organizations examined more than 500 applications for admission to the party. In 'X' independent infantry battalion, for instance, more than half the officers and men have applied to join the party. This battalion is fighting heroically against Dushmans who have penetrated Lowgar Province.

"The servicemen of the 1st battalion of a certain infantry regiment are also giving an excellent account of themselves. They recently rebuffed an attack by a gang on a truck column not far from the settlement of Mohammad Aghah. Lt (Makhmud Nasim), Sergeant (Mansur), Privates (Samar) and (Asad) and others set examples of combat heroism and mutual assistance in this battle. After the battle many servicemen applied to join the PDPA.

"There are many examples of heroism displayed by Afghan soldiers, sergeants and officers in defending the gains of the April revolution. The servicemen's combat skills and political consciousness have increased. Their courage and selflessness are the convincing guarantee that the perfidious plans of the imperialists, who are gambling on the Afghan counterrevolution, will fail. Our people will not yield to anyone the freedom gained at such a price. We firmly declare: Victory will be ours."

Soviet Service Life

PM251157 Moscow KRASNAYA ZVEZDA in Russian 22 Mar 83 first edition p 2

[Report by Correspondent Lt Col V. Skrizhalin: "The Soldiers Spoke of the Exploit...."]

[Text] Limited contingent of Soviet troops in Afghanistan [no date given]-- The cold, gusty wind beat against the canvas wall of the tent like a large bird. And from time to time those addressing the Komsomol meeting raised their voices, betraying their emotion still more. And the soldiers were speaking of an exploit. They were speaking with pride of Aleksandr Matrosov and Nikolay Gastello, of their virtual contemporary Lt Aleksandr Stoiba and former Comrade in Arms Ruslan Aushev....

The meeting was taking place in a subunit of the limited contingent of Soviet troops in Afghanistan. Tactical exercises demanding endurance and courage from the servicemen had just ended. Many of them bore orders and medals on their chests. All this lent special meaning to their words. And the magnetic power of the exploit could be felt particularly keenly.

I looked at the inspired faces of the soldiers, sergeants and young officers and listened to their heartfelt words and I involuntarily recalled meetings in the steep mountain passes, on marches, during the minutes of furious tension during combat training....

The mountains. However far you look jagged peaks cluster to the remote horizon. Gray ribbons of roads wind between them, plunge into ravines and hurtle headlong into the expanses of the valleys.

These roads are the living threads linking remote mountain settlements and making it possible to deliver there everything necessary for life. Perfectly well aware of this, the Dushmans mine and blow up bridges and fire on vehicles carrying the most peaceful cargoes--grain and medical supplies. The local organs of power frequently appeal for help to the command of units belonging to the limited contingent of Soviet troops. Our servicemen come to the aid of their Afghan friends.

...When Lt Sergey Andrianov's eyes begin to smart from looking at the mountains, he shifts his gaze to the road. A narrow road looping between steep cliffs, it leads to a remote Afghan hamlet where sick children have been waiting for healing medical supplies for several days. This is the most vulnerable place--the road. Lieutenant Andrianov sees the combat engineers advancing slowly, groping their way--the path is mined. You feel a perfidious hand has been at work here. And the mines? What foreign stickers do they not bear! Lt Sergey Andrianov does not look away from the eye-pieces of his binoculars for a long time. He does not like the dim specks of light on the mountain slopes--they are either windows catching the rays of the sun and brightly reflecting them or the lenses of binoculars flashing in incautious enemy hands....

The company commander is not here today. He, Lieutenant Andrianov, a young platoon commander, has to command the subunit. This keeps him in a state of constant tension and readiness for action.

The first shots set off a dull, multiple echo in the ravine. A hot wave of combat excitement swept over Lieutenant Andrianov. He seemed to be able to sense the mood of each soldier and gave clear orders. He behaved as though he had had to do this frequently in a similar situation. Andrianov saw his subordinates with different eyes, as it were. They acted boldly and selflessly. Yet it was not an exercise where a platoon from the next company stands in for the enemy. You only had to listen to make out the whine of the bullets....

Young officers do not often have to prove themselves in their new capacity as commanders in such conditions. And now whoever looks at Sergey Andrianov will observe without fail: "So young, but he has a combat award!"

The order of the Red Star shines scarlet on the lieutenant's breast.

When does a driver feel light-hearted? When the engine is singing evenly and the road is flying by beneath the wheels and he is sure he will reach his destination on time. This was not the first time driver Private Mikhail Gutsu has been on such a journey. Over several months of service he has many kilometers of winding mountain roads behind him. Mikhail grips the steering wheel confidently and carefully keeps his distance in the convoy of advancing trucks. The freight in the truck is urgent--food for the inhabitants of an Afghan hamlet. That is why there should be no delays en route.

But what's this? The leading truck slows down, begins to swerve to the side of the road, and comes to a standstill. The driver jumps from the cabin and raises the steaming hood. Mikhail can see his young comrade's dismayed face: Just try to determine where the fault is straight off! Private Gutsu rushes to his aid. There is no time to lose. A suspicious silence looms over the deserted mountain road. Mikhail knows that at any second it may be broken by the bandits' perfidious shots.

Private Gutsu's face is blazing from the heat of the hot engine. Where is the failure? Mikhail Gutsu runs through the possible causes of faults. This is hard even on an ordinary, mundane journey, but here he is surrounded by mountains concealing danger.

"Look!" His comrade touches his shoulder. Mikhail raises his head--human figures can be glimpsed on the steep slope between the rocks. Of course, it is hardly likely that someone will have climbed there by accident. Gutsu nods toward the submachinegun:

"Keep an eye on them..."

And he himself bends over the engine again. Careful turns of the spanner follow. And how pleasant it is after all that to half-whisper, half-sigh: "Start up!"

And the road flies to meet them again....

A combat engineer's work is like a jeweler's. That's the only way to describe it. He has work to do here, on the territory of friendly Afghanistan. The Dushmans lard the mountain roads and paths with mines. How many of these roads and paths guards Sgt Abbas Israfilov has opened up to traffic!

Slowly, Abbas gropes his way along the mountain road with his comrades. Some other time you might walk along it listening to the mysterious sound of the river running into the ravine, feasting your eyes on the snow of the inaccessible peaks glittering in the sun. But you have no time for the beauties of nature now. Every centimeter of ground must be "sounded out." There's no other way. The blast will resound with a sinister echo among the mountains if the mechanism of any "surprise" placed by a Dushman's hand should work.

There is no time to wipe the sweat from his brow, no time to straighten his back. "We are like archeologists," Abbas sometimes jokes. And there is a certain aptness in these words: Archeologists return to life objects which man lost long ago while combat engineers guard life itself. They guard it at a risk to their own lives. Abbas has been awarded the order of the Red Star and the "For Valor" medal. He has to his credit, in a comparatively brief space of time, 118 defused mines and incendiary devices. That is 118 duels with death.

His comrades in arms know Abbas as a fearless, selfless man. The commander once said of him: "Israfilov has the character of a frontline soldier." There is a lot behind those meaningful, accurate words.

The cold wind beat at the tent walls. But inside there was warmth from the emotional words and the high pitch of feeling.

The soldiers were speaking of an exploit....

Soviet Army Kindness, Bravery

LD190740 Moscow TASS in English 0623 GMT 19 Mar 83

["Over and Above the Call of Duty"--TASS headline]

[Text] Kabul, 18 Mar, TASS--The TASS correspondent reports:

The presence in the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan of the limited contingent of Soviet troops has been marked by many good deeds. I should like to narrate some of them.

1. "Khashar" in a Kishlak

What does it cost to build a home? For some of the peasants of the Alpine Kishlak Kala-i-dala, new homes cost nothing at all. They were built by Soviet soldiers free.

...A gang of Dushmans has been dispersed. An Afghan army unit is gone on another combat assignment. A Soviet field-engineer company enters the Kishlak. Its orders are to clear the area of mines. The sappers fulfilled their mission before schedule. And then one of them--Sergeant Sabit Nugmanov--told his comrades about an old fine custom existing in Uzbekistan where he comes from. "When in a Kishlak back home someone decides to build a house, all the inhabitants come over to help him. The custom is called 'khashar', and people really put their heart into it."

All the company supported the sergeant's proposal to organise such a "khashar" in the Afghan village ravaged by the assault of the bandits. And the work was in full swing. New homes grew like mushrooms. Even smoke appeared in a new home's chimney stack--the grateful hosts began cooking a dinner for all the builders. And they celebrated the house-warming together: Soviet soldiers and Afghan peasants. In addition to the new homes, the soldiers left the villagers another "present"--the wonderful tradition of "khashar." Thus, a difficult job one cannot handle alone will yield to concerted efforts of friends.

2. With no right to make an error

A badge "for mine clearing" and a medal "for courage," blazed on the uniform of the Private Umar Khidoyatov. He received them for his gallantry and skill.

The school which the children of a kishlak were preparing to attend was found to have been mined. Some of the local people saw the Dushmans carrying ammunition there, and the rapid action of the Afghan army unit prevented the bandits from blasting the school.

The company commander, Senior Lieutenant B. Ulyukin asked for volunteers. All the company stepped forward. The commander selected the most experienced ones. Private Khidoyatov was the first to enter the school to reconnoiter.

The minutes of waiting, with time seeming to have paused: An explosion may follow at any moment. A sapper has no right to make an error--it will be his first and last. Was Umar calm? No, he was not. Was he nervous? Very. But this was no hindrance in his work. Rapidly and confidently, he examined every square metre of the premises. "Surprises" cropped up, now here, now there. Losing no time to defuse them--his comrades would take charge--he only marked the mines' locations by little flags.

...On the morrow, the company was leaving the kishlak. Little boys and girls spilling out of the school long waved them goodbye. And the Soviet soldiers set out to face further challenges.

Attack on Rice Convoy

PM240943 [Editorial Report] Moscow KRASNAYA ZVEZDA in Russian 23 March 1983 publishes on page 3 a 2,200-word undated Afghanistan dispatch by special correspondent Col Yu. Teplov under the heading "That Bitter-Sweet Rice," describing a Soviet army convoy's journey from Qonduz to Kabul with a consignment of rice. Teplov describes a halt while combat engineers cleared mines from the road and mentions a driver whose cab has "two holes going all the way through--a reminder of an encounter with bandits." Having described the convoy's progress through "the most unsettled section of the route--the three Baghlans," Teplov continues:

"But we only had to leave northern Baghlan for the absence of human life to affect our nerves and for the tension to begin to mount. Again dark hovels and dry irrigation ditches passed by on both sides. It seemed that the silence which consumed even the roar of the motors was about to be broken by a shot or burst of fire.

"That is what happened. Ahead a submachinegun emitted along, chattering burst, and then a rapid burst of fire came from closer by.

"'It's started,' my neighbor, guards Ensign Koka, said without any expression in his voice.

"The next burst struck right by us. Twice it clattered against the armoring. The convoy continued to advance, but the speed had increased noticeably. Then the shooting abated as abruptly as it had begun.

"'Surely that's not all?' Koka said in surprise.

"This time it was indeed 'all.' Not as it had been 3 days before, when a convoy was traveling to Qonduz. Then the Dushmans even fired on the trucks with a grenade launcher. The convoy had been obliged to stop.

"Drivers Vitaliy Fadeyev, Aleksandr Demin, Gennadiy Ivanov and Sergey Sychev jumped from the cabs, dropping behind the wheels of their trucks. Ours was

approaching them along the open side of the road. From the front and rear of the convoy two armored transports came in and covered the Ural trucks with their flank plating, for the convoy had to be diverted as rapidly as possible. Fadeyev rapidly crawled to the leading vehicle and jumped through the open cab door, but a Dushman's bullet prevented him from moving off, stinging him somewhere near the knee. But guards Capt Viktor Maslennikov took the wheel of the Ural and the truck moved off. The second Ural was driven out of range of fire by guards Lt Mikhail Alkhimov, the rations and forage officer....

"That was what had happened 3 days before. But today we passed through this sector almost peacefully. Indeed, it had previously been considered quiet. Freight had traveled in both directions along this road and reached its destination with no special adventures.

"I wonder now why it was precisely this convoy which generated such fierce hatred among the Dushmans? And I can find only one explanation: rice. It is inconvenient to the counterrevolution for the food situation in the republic to be stabilized, for the people to see that the people's power wants to make their lives easier and that soldiers with Red Stars on their caps are ready to aid them at any moment.

"It is now known that a combined gang had come down from the mountains and was waiting for the rice convoy in particular. Perhaps the gang ringleaders reckoned that the Soviet soldiers would take fright and refuse to carry so peaceful and so dangerous a load....

"Time marches on. It not only heals wounds but also changes people's mentality. The hamlet inhabitants who heard the shooting at the time looked fearfully at the advancing convoy. How would the soldiers behave now? Would they have reprisals? There were no jokes or smiles. But our servicemen were perfectly well aware that the people and the bandits are not one and the same...."

The final part of the report briefly describes Teplov's parting with the convoy and his thoughts on the Soviet servicemen's work.

CSO: 1801/234